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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/21/2012  
TAGS: PARM MARR PREL BE  
SUBJECT: BELGIANS SET TO PASS BILL BARRING USE OF DEPLETED  
MUNITIONS BY BELGIAN FORCES

Classified By: Political Counselor Theodore H Andrews, Reason  
1.4 (B)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a move designed to placate the vocal pacifist lobby, Belgium's House of Representatives is poised on March 22, 2007 to pass legislation barring Belgium's armed forces from using depleted uranium munitions. A compromise forged by mingling proposals tabled by the Flemish Socialists, the French-speaking Greens, and the French-speaking Christian Democrats, the proposed law would not come into effect until two years after publication of the implementing regulations. We believe we have succeeded in protecting U.S. interests -- the law will not prevent Belgian troops from participating, planning, or assisting operations (e.g. with transportation) in which other troops are using depleted uranium weapons. End Summary

¶2. (U) Belgian parliamentary leaders have confirmed press reports that the lower house is likely to pass legislation on March 22, 2007 that would make it illegal for Belgian troops to use munitions employing depleted uranium. The vote should be uneventful. It follows the unanimous passage of the draft measure by the parliament's defense committee and the active sponsorship of the proposal by the governing coalition's parliamentary floor leader, Dirk Van Der Maelen, a Flemish Socialist.

¶3. (C) In response to urgent queries by the embassy, both Van Der Maelen and Defense Committee Chairman Stef Goris have admitted that the measure is nothing more than a gesture. They also have insisted that it serves a useful electoral purpose for the socialists and liberals who make up the coalition, not least by taking the steam out of a parallel movement to enact more burdensome restrictions on the use of cluster munitions. In addition, the bill lets the Flemish socialists play to the pacifist movement, a significant element of their base, while permitting the Liberals to burnish their image in the same community.

¶4. (SBU) Also in response to questions about the potential for harm to the interests of the U.S. or other allies who use depleted uranium, our contacts have pointed to several points. Noting our concerns about restrictions on the transit of U.S. material, the bill makes "absolutely no mention" of the issue. The accompanying committee report of the bill notes explicitly that Belgian forces can freely participate, plan, and assist operations with troops using depleted uranium. The bill itself includes language indicating it applies exclusively to depleted uranium munitions and to no other type of material.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: We are willing to accept assurances that this proposed bill will do as little as its sponsors seem to

think. In the absence of large-scale press attention (such as occurred with regard to the cluster munitions bill), it appears likely that the current proposal will secure passage and then get placed on the shelf. We will remain vigilant nonetheless. New elections occur on June 10 that could bring an even more favorable majority to power. End comment.  
Imbrie